OPINION theJohnsonian

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America the great?

Dave Birley
Staff Writer

Odd, isn't it? We grow up in this country, being constantly bombarded with the propaganda shared by the media, our teachers, our neighbors, and our parents, that this country is the greatest, the noblest, the most loving country in the entire world. When we live inside that environment we are not well equipped to find the answer to "Compared to what?"

So we have a population of over 300 million people. That's a whole bunch for sure. China and India each have more than we do, and not too far behind us are Indonesia, Brazil and Pakistan. When we evaluate the life-style of folks in those countries, it appears that sheer numbers do not create any basis of "greatness", so perhaps it is something else. Let's see. How about "standard of living" – whatever that means. U.S. News and World Report tells us, using that term as the measuring stick, that Germany, Canada, the and United Kingdom are all above us on the list, with Sweden just a few drops of sauna sweat behind us.

How about military power? Ah. There we are. Nicely on top of the heap. Our Global Firepower puts us ahead of Russia, China, India and the United Kingdom in that category. So, "might makes right"? We're the toughest guy on the block, and don't go knocking down our sandcastles? Something about that does not fit in my mind with terms like "Greatest", "Noblest", or "most loving".

Now I've heard a rumor that there's some kind of an election thing going on right now. Have you heard that? Apparently we are supposed to select one individual to lead this country for the next four, or possibly eight years. In addition, we are supposed to select folks to fill the seats in the House and the Senate for two and for six years respectively. We are told that our votes matter, that they "count." After all, this is a Democracy, isn't it? Dr. Lipscomb might take issue with you over that term. He might prefer that you refer to this country as a Representative Republic.

In a true Democracy the general public, or at least those that measure up to the requirements to be allowed to participate, vote for almost everything. Not just who will stand up on their behalf in the governing process, not everyone from the king to the dog-catcher, but whether there should be a new stoplight at the intersection of a couple of streets. In a situation where the number of eligible voters is small enough, like a village with a population of about ten people, this can actually work, but with 300 million people? It is quite simply impossible for a consensus to be reached on anything.

And so we have this wonderful noisy, messy rough and tumble system that flares into life every couple of years, and we are invited to take part in the process.

'Course the problem is that if we don't take part? Then the mess just gets a whole lot messier. And looking back at those lists of folks who are above us in several lists? I'm not strongly motivated to want to live under the systems they have in place. We may be a bit whacked out, especially at this short time before the 2016 election, but, know what? I'll take it. I love my country, and fit as a fiddle or phony as a fake fishing fly, our system seems to survive all the crazy things we do to it, and the people we elect do to it too. So, rally 'round the flag folks! And God bless the USA!

Minority women at the polls

Isabella Rodriguez
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Hayley Neiling / The Johnsonian

Every four or eight years when it comes time to elect a new president, there are several factors we consider: their stances on social issues, their economic policies and how fit they seem to be the president. However, this election has been extremely atypical in that we have two extremely polarizing candidates with historically low favorability ratings. Just like most Americans who can vote, I am frustrated with the options.

However, everything about me, especially my race and my gender, dictates who I am voting for. As a minority and a woman, I cannot vote for a man like Donald Trump who has torn down everything I am and what I stand for. I do have some issues with Hillary Clinton, but she does not insult or demean entire groups of people, including the ones I identify with. I have always understood both candidates because in the past, the candidates have been extremely qualified to be the president. There are people who want Trump simply because he is not an "establishment politician", but that does not make up for every unacceptable thing he has said in the last year.

He started off his campaign by insulting Mexican immigrants, who are some of the most dedicated, hard-working group of people this country has ever known, and has not stopped insulting just about every minority in this country. I have tried time and time again to understand the appeal of this man, but I truly cannot because he hates everything about me: Hispanic, a woman, and the child of immigrants. I have always paid attention to politics, but this election is different because this is the first time I can vote.

I have never seen such harmful rhetoric from someone who wants to be the leader of the free world. I have never felt targeted by a politician until now, and it is not something I ever imagined would happen in a country like this one. For over 200 years, America has prided itself on its diversity and acceptance of people from every walk of life; candidates who run for office are aware of this and do what they can to embody these great American values. No one in this country, regardless of who they are, should ever feel marginalized--especially not by someone who wants to lead them and represent them in the eyes of the rest of the world. In the final debate, Hillary Clinton said that "America is already great because America is good". America is good because it is made up of every kind of person anyone can think of.

I cannot comprehend anyone like me voting for Donald Trump because that would be a complete denial of identity. While there are people out there who are racist and bigoted and ignorant, there is no reason to elect a president who is that way. America has long been the picture of freedom because of how well we understand the importance of accepting everyone, no matter who they are or where they came from. Make sure your voice is heard on Election Day, Nov. 8.

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